

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as shown below, in which added terms are indicated with underscoring and/or deleted terms are indicated with strikethrough or with double bracketing. This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

1. (Currently Amended) A gear case assembly with a pressure-compensating function for use as a lower part of a marine propulsion machine, said gear case assembly comprising:

a gear case provided with a substantially vertical drive shaft receiving bore formed therein to receive a drive shaft, said gear case also having a gear chamber formed therein which is connected to the lower end of the drive shaft receiving bore,

[[a]] the drive shaft being rotatably supported in said drive shaft receiving bore,

a bevel gear mechanism for transmitting power from the drive shaft to a propeller shaft, and a forward/backward selector clutch mechanism disposed in said gear chamber,

said gear case further having a shift rod receiving bore formed therein which is substantially parallel to the drive shaft receiving bore,

a shift rod supported in said shift rod receiving bore for operating the forward/backward selector clutch mechanism,

said shift rod receiving bore having an upper end opening in an upper surface of the gear case, and

said gear case having a connecting hole formed therein connecting an upper part of the drive shaft receiving bore and an upper part of the shift rod receiving bore; and

a covering member attached to the upper surface of the gear case so as to cover the upper

end of the shift rod receiving bore, said covering member being provided with an opening through which the shift rod is passed into the shift rod receiving bore, and said covering member also having a body part, and a pressure-compensating wall bulging upward from the body part, wherein said gear case and said covering member cooperate to define a pressure-compensating chamber.

2. (Previously Presented) The gear case assembly with a pressure-compensating function according to claim 1, wherein the shift rod operates said selector clutch mechanism to select a forward drive mode or a backward drive mode when the shift rod is turned.

3. (Previously Presented) The gear case assembly with a pressure-compensating function according to claim 1, wherein the shift rod comprises an upper shift rod portion and a lower shift rod portion, and wherein the lower shift rod portion has an upper end part that extends through the covering member, projects upward from the covering member and is operatively connected to a lower end part of the upper shift rod portion.

4. (Previously Presented) The gear case assembly with a pressure-compensating function according to claim 1, wherein the covering member comprises a shift rod support part extending beneath an upper surface of the gear case, and wherein the pressure-compensating wall is situated above the upper surface of the gear case.

5. (Previously Presented) The gear case assembly with a pressure-compensating function according to claim 1, wherein the covering member comprises an inner cylindrical part that supports the shift rod passed therethrough, and an outer cylindrical part formed integrally with the inner cylindrical part,

wherein the inner and the outer cylindrical part are connected by the upward bulging pressure-compensating wall.

6. (Previously Presented) The gear case assembly with a pressure-compensating function according to claim 5, wherein the inner cylindrical part has an upper expanded part, and further comprising an annular sealing member fitted on the shift rod in the upper expanded part of the inner cylindrical part.

7. (Previously Presented) The gear case assembly with a pressure-compensating function according to claim 5, wherein the outer cylindrical part is configured and formed in a size to be fitted in an upper part of the shift rod receiving bore, and further comprising an O-ring put in an annular groove formed in the outside surface of the outer cylindrical part.

8. (Previously Presented) The gear case assembly with a pressure-compensating

function according to claim 6, wherein an upper surface of the covering member, excluding the upward bulging pressure-compensating wall, is flush with an upper end surface of the annular sealing member fitted in the inner cylindrical part of the covering member.

9. (Currently Amended) The gear case assembly with a pressure-compensating function according to claim 1, wherein the covering member is provided with a ~~pair of~~ second upward bulging pressure-compensating wall[[s]] ~~respectively~~ cooperating with the gear case to define a second pressure-compensating chamber[[s]], and wherein the pressure-compensating walls are separated from each other by a groove.